

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESB 5094

As Reported by House Committee On:
Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade

Title: An act relating to special assessments for conservation district activities and programs.

Brief Description: Changing the maximum per parcel rate for conservation district special assessments.

Sponsors: Senator Jacobsen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade: 3/30/05, 4/1/05 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Increases the maximum annual special assessment rate to \$10 per parcel for natural resource conservation activities by conservation districts in counties with populations of 500,000 or more.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE & TRADE

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Linville, Chair; Pettigrew, Vice Chair; Blake, Chase, Clibborn, Grant, Kenney, Kilmer, McCoy, Morrell, Quall and Wallace.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Kristiansen, Ranking Minority Member; Buri, Dunn, Haler, Holmquist, Kretz, Newhouse and Strow.

Staff: Meg Van Schoorl (786-7105).

Background:

Conservation districts are authorized to engage in a variety of natural resource conservation activities, including the conservation of soil and water. In 1989, the Legislature authorized a process through which county legislative authorities could generate funds to finance conservation district activities by establishing a system of special assessments on lands located within the district.

By August prior to the year assessments are proposed to begin, conservation district supervisors conduct a public hearing on the proposed system of assessments. After the public

hearing, on or before August 1, the supervisors can file the proposed system of assessments and a budget with the county legislative authority. The county must then hold a public hearing on the proposal, and find that the public interest will be served and that the special assessments will not exceed the benefit the land will receive from the district activities. The county may accept or revise the proposed system of assessments, and once agreed to, must post notice as specified in statute.

The system of assessments will include a classification of lands, an annual per acre rate of assessment for each classification, and the total assessment proposed. Lands that will not receive benefit are to be classified separately and not subject to the assessment.

The maximum annual rate of special assessments is 10 cents per acre, or \$5 per parcel, or both. Special assessments may be imposed for up to 10 years. They are spread by the county assessor separately on the tax rolls, and are collected along with property taxes by the county treasurer. The county treasurer deducts a specified amount established by the county legislative authority for the county's costs in spreading and collecting the assessment.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The maximum annual special assessment rate is increased from \$5 to \$10 per parcel in counties with a population over 500,000. After the county treasurer deducts an amount to cover their costs and those of the county assessors, the remaining special assessment funds collected shall be transferred to the conservation district for its use as authorized in statute for natural resource conservation.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Counties with populations in excess of 500,000 may increase the annual special assessment rate to a maximum of \$10 per parcel. Engrossed Senate Bill 5094 allowed counties with populations over 1.5 million to impose the increased assessment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: We face a number of natural resource challenges in Pierce County including protection of shellfish beds, restoration of habitat for ESA-listed salmon, and loss of farmland to development. The goal of conservation districts is to save national treasures of the soil and to keep farmers profitable. We operate on-the-ground practical programs that help landowners protect and sustain natural resources and meet federal and state mandates. Raising the assessment would be at the option of local government, and would not affect the state

budget. The current bill enables only King County to increase the assessment rate. We would like to have the additional assessment authority as well.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Monty Mahan and Paul Nee, Pierce Conservation District; Robert Holland, American Farmland Trust; and Scott Wallace, King Conservation District.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.